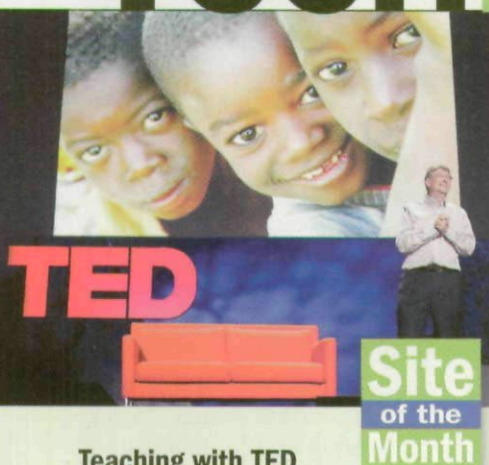


TechKnowledge



Teaching with TED

Teachingwithted.pbwiki.com

TED, the annual gathering of the world's leading "thinkers and doers" (www.ted.com), has inspired many. Now, thanks to educator Jackie Gerstein, there's "Teaching with TED," a recently launched wiki that aims to bring some of that inspiration into K-12 classrooms.

Since 1984, the invitation-only TED conference (the acronym stands for technology, entertainment, design) has attracted notables who deliver 18-minute talks that span science, the arts, important world issues, and extraordinary personal experience. TED talks on video are wildly popular, and now freely available for noncommercial use under a Creative Commons license. But how to use them with students? "The potential for classroom use is tremendous," Juliette LaMontagne, a New York City teacher, wrote on the Teaching with TED wiki. "The challenge for educators will be scaffolding the talks, providing the appropriate context and support."

"Do Schools Kill Creativity?" a stirring preso by Sir Ken Robinson, is among the talks featured on the wiki, which includes the embedded video, related links, and discussion questions. Then there's Scott McCloud deciphering comics: a must-see.—Kathy Ishizuka

Twittering Dante

New models for student writing in the digital age

Cracking Dante's *Inferno* is a tough row to hoe for any high school student—but what if the reading assignment was conducted via Twitter?

The exercise "Twitter in Hell" was handed to some lucky seniors at University Laboratory High School at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, after reading the classic tome. Their mission? To write 140-character tweets describing each level in hell as if they were Dante writing to his beloved Beatrice.

It's a far cry from the standard writing assignment, but to Kathleen Blake Yancey, the idea of twittering Dante makes sense. Young people today are actively engaged writers—they simply choose to do their composing using more dynamic, digital means, such as chatting on MySpace or texting over cell phones. In her opinion, it's up to educators to capture that impulse in the work they do in school.

"In a world of writing tests, we want students to submit," says Yancey, Kellogg H. Hunt Professor of English at Florida State University. "But the world of Web 2.0 is about participation."

Yancey's recent report, "Writing in the 21st Century," which she compiled as past president for the National Council of Teachers of English, could serve as a study guide for those educators stumped by how to reengage students in the process of writing. (www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Press/Yancey_final.pdf)

Yancey believes it's time for school systems to adapt and has challenged educators with three tasks to help steer the

process: develop new models of writing, then design a new curriculum for students to support these models, and finally create ways for educators to actually teach this curriculum.

Librarians and teachers have certainly made inroads in bringing new models into writing classes. At Westlake High School

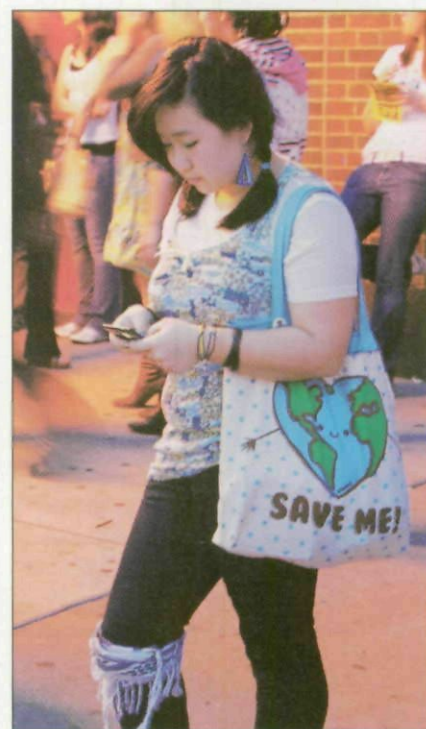


Photo by uberculture on www.flickr.com.

in Austin, TX, students work on an annual Vietnam War project, researching names from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, and e-mailing veterans' family members to glean information for their profiles. Another class collaboratively built a series of online Cliffs Notes for David James Duncan's *The River Why*, all using a wiki.

"It's more of a meshing of reading and writing," says Carolyn Foote, district and lead librarian at Westlake. "And more of this is happening in the library

space, with [students] taking notes and then writing on a computer here."

A recent UK study found that text messages can contribute to reading skills (See "Study: TMOT, Texting Can Help Reading Skills" at tinyurl.com/br9kuh). "People who read well are good at text messages, and [those who] text are good readers," says Yancey. "That shorthand relies on a close association with sound and letters."

But how to bring this new perspective to bear in the classroom? That's sometimes

a struggle, especially when teachers are faced with those assessments demanded by their districts and states. In other words, twittering Dante may be fun—but does it translate into higher SAT scores? Educators may need to find a way to make that happen. According to Yancey, schools must reconcile the need to test with the way young people communicate and write, or risk looking irrelevant to students.

"If we don't make changes in the system," she says, "then schools will have less relevance."—*Lauren Barack*

Test DRIVE

Plustek Book Reader V100 Book Scanner, Reader

Details available at www.plustek.com/product/bookreader_v100.asp. \$699.

BY JEFFREY HASTINGS

Already miffed by the text-to-speech feature built into the Kindle 2, the Authors Guild might get downright peeved if they catch wind of some of the hype surrounding the Plustek Book Reader. After all, the device promises to be able to scan a book, read it aloud, and save that reading as an MP3 audio file. Paper-back to iPod playback at the push of a button? Bye-bye audiobook revenues, right? Well, hold back your legal team, Authors Guild, that's highly doubtful.

Though the Plustek Book Reader delivers on its basic promises, scanning a full-blown tome with it is a tedious, time-consuming process. And, with all due respect to "Jill," the synthesized voice that reads American English on the book reader I tested, well... she ain't no James Earl Jones. What the book scanner and its accompanying optical character recognition (OCR) and text-to-speech (TTS) software do offer is serviceable assistive technology for the visually impaired and those with serious reading deficits.

The V100 hardware is virtually identical to the OpticBook 3600 Book Scanner I reviewed back in October 2007, but with braille controls making it a self-serve solution for visually impaired readers. Scan a page and an app called BookVoice opens, displaying the text in the color/contrast

scheme and magnification of the user's choice. Text is dynamically highlighted as the selected TTS voice reads aloud. In addition to Jill, my demo offered the more mellifluous, Mexican Spanish tones of "Javier." Other languages/dialects are available.

I invited assistive technology consultant Christine Tonge to examine the book reader. While mildly impressed with the overall package, she turned up her nose at the OCR software. "It uses the ABBYY FineReader version 6.0 to recognize text," said Tonge. "They're up to version 9.0 now and it's so much better."

Indeed, users can expect a few unrecognized and/or misread characters per page using the Book Reader along with having to decipher the idiosyncrasies of the various TTS voices. But considering that the Plustek Book Reader V100 is a relatively cheap, all-in-one assistive technology solution, I don't think that's a high hurdle for a challenged reader to hop over. Want to judge the Book Reader's output for yourself? Find a sample MP3 of my own pointless prose, scanned and read by Jill at slj.podbean.com.

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THE DETAILS

System: Windows
2000, XP, Vista.

Scanning surface:
8.5 x 11.7 inches.

1200 DPI
Optical resolution.

Scans to color or
greyscale PDF
or text file.

Connects to PC via
USB cable (Included.)

THE CONSOLE

(Gizmo at-a-glance).
One is lowest and
five is highest.

HOT OR NOT?
(Overall impression)



COOL 4 SCHOOL?
(Educational Utility)



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